"...FOR TO STAY A LITTLE WHILE..."

A Folk Play of Today

Walter Scheinman

"...For To Stay A Little While..."

Characters:

MARNIE
EBEN
MA
JOSHUA

Scene: The North Carolina mountains.

Time: The Present.

The scene is the back porch of a cabin in the North Carolina mountains. The porch, a weather-beaten faded outgrowth is simple as the house it adorns. A plain wood floor raised two steps from the ground, a few supports for the roof. It is downstage right, on an angle with the foots, the rest of the house half-visible off right. Downstage center is a cleared space of dirt, the end of a path that wanders off up left. In the distance the hills of russet and gold and dark green can be seen, and the great space seems to dwarf the simple porch and almost to scorn its intrusion among the great pines down left and in the distance. It is twilight of an autumn evening, and the after-glow casts over everything an orange haze which gradually deepens to dusk and night. On the edge of the porch, leaning against one of its posts sits MARNIE, a simple, naive mountain girl of about eighteen dressed quite plainly, looking wistfully off into the distance. A guitar strums off stage and MARNIE begins to sing. It is part of a mountain folk-song, "He's Gone Away."

MARNIE

...He's gone away
For to stay a little while;
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

Look away, look away, look away over Yandro,
On Yandro's high hill where them white doves are flyin'
From bough to bough and a-matin' with their mates,
So why not me with mine?

For he's gone, oh he's gone away
For to stay a little while,
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

I'll go build me a desrick on Yandro's high hill,
Where the wild beasts won't bother me nor hear my sad cry.
For he's gone, he's gone away
For to stay a little while,
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

(She has sung it plaintively, sadly, and through the song the

light has been dimming till she finishes it in total darkness save for a spotlight which goes out when she stops, closes her eyes, and leans back against the post. The guitar is still heard, however, and in a few seconds when the spot comes up again revealing MARNIE on the edge of the porch looking down at EBEN, the guitar is in his hands. EBEN is a young farmer, tall, lean, likeable, half-sitting, half-lying on the steps. He finishes with a few chords, lays the guitar down, and looks up at MARNIE. There is a pause.)

MARNIE

That was pretty, Eben.

EBEN

I only learned it for you, Marnie. (He gazes steadily at her.)

MARNIE

Thank you, Eben. I like it.

EBEN

I'm glad. (A pause)

MARNIE

Eben...

EBEN

Yes, Marhie...?

MARNIE

(Softly) Do you think you... you could teach it to me?

EBEN

If you'd want me.

MARNIE

I would, Eben.

EBEN

All right. (He takes her hand.) When'll we start at it, Marnie?

MARNIE

Now, Eben. Teach me now.

EBEN

But it's gettin' nigh on nine o'clock, and you know we've gotta be up early for spring plantin'.

MARNIE

But Eben, you know I'm always up before the men folks...

EBEN

And...and besides I wanted to stalk to you a bit.

MARNIE

(Nervously) Eben...

EBEN

(Determined) Marnie, I -

MARNIE

(Quickly) Teach it to me, Eben. (She caresses his hair)

EBEN

(Drawing her hand down, gazing at it) Marnie, I...I've got something I've just gotta tell you, something I -

MARNIE

(Caressing him faster as if to silence him) Eben, teach me the song!

EBEN

But Marnie, I...(He pulls her hand closer)

MARNIE

(Drawing it away suddenly) No, Eben. (Witha great effort holding back her tears) Teach me the song, Eben! Sing it to me, Eben!

EBEN

(Looks at her a moment, then slowly takes up his guitar, strikes several chord and sings)
I'm goin' away for to stay a little while,
But I'm comin' back if I go ten thousand miles.
Oh who will tie your shoes,
And who will glove your hands?
And who will kiss your ruby lips when I am gone?

MARNIE

(As EBEN helps her making the words with his lips, at first slowly)
Oh it's Pappy'll tie my shoes,
And Mammy'll glove my hands,
And you will kiss my ruby lips when you come back.
(Then more strongly)
Oh it's Pappy'll tie my shoes,
And Mammy'll glove my hands,
And you will kiss my ruby lips when you come back.
(She stops and

(She stops and gazes at EBEN.)

EBEN

(Stops playihg the guitar, lays it down, and looks fascinated at MARNIE. He takes her hands and kisses her on the lips. Low) I love you, Marnie.

MARNIE

(In a whisper) I love you too, Eben. (She holds his head in her hands, looks into his eyes, then suddenly draws him to her and they embrace passionately. There is a pause. Finally MARNIE breaks the silence in a voice trembling as is her heart.) I think the moon's right pretty tonight.

EBEN

I do too.

MARNIE

It's just like a silver dollar - all clean and round and shiny...

EBEN

...and very big. (Another pause) I like a full moon.

MARNIE

I like the spring too. It's bright and fresh...

EBEN

And everything seems brand new - store bought! (They laugh)

MARNIE

(Feeling her way) I always think the same things whenever I smell the spring, Eben.

EBEN

What's that, Marnie?

MARNIE

Oh, maybe just how the black trees'll be all green, or how sweet the rains will feel on the moss, or how right a baby robin seems in the spring...or...

EBEN

Or what, Marnie?

MARNIE

Or...or how nice a weddin' in the spring time is. (She looks away)

EBEN

(Taking her hands. Eagerly) Marnie! Marnie, is that what you... you want...a weddin' in the springtime?

MARNIE

Yes, Eben.

EBEN

(Happily) Oh, Marnie, Marnie. (Suddenly, low) Will you marry me, Marnie?

MARNIE

Yes, Eben.

EBEN

And we'll have it in the springtime with the bright new grass and the new leaves...and...

MARNIE

And a new wonderful life for us! Oh, Eben! (They embrace . When they relax Marnie leans against the post and EBEN rests his head in her lap. They look off lost in dreams a moment.)

EBEN

Marnie...

MARNIE

Yes, Eben?

EBEN

Are you happy?

MARNIE

Happy, Eben?...I don't know if it's happiness or a terrible sadness my heart's feeling right now. But it's the strongest feeling I've ever known...and I think I'll never be happier.

EBEN

Not even when the spring comes again, Marnie, <u>our</u> spring? After we've passed the summer of our love, all full and green, and the golden autumn of our engagement feast, and the longest, coldest, greyest winter we'll ever know? Not even in that new wonderful springtime?

MARNIE

Oh, yes, Eben, yes! I'm not really happy now - not in this spring! I can't be until I've lived through this one more year, this beautiful year! (Softly) But Eben, my heart's warm now...and glad.

EBEN

So's mine, Marnie. So glad. (A pause)

MARNIE

Eben, do you reckon we should tell Ma?

EBEN

Of course, Marnie. Why not?

MARNIE

I mean right away. Couldn't we keep it a secret for a little bit?

EBEN

If you'd really like to, Marnie.

MARNIE

(After a moment, quickly) No, Eben. I wouldn't like to. I want Ma to know, and Joshua, and Uncle Ben, and everybody. I want 'em all to know!

EBEN

And what about your secret?

MARNIE

(Smiling a bit shame-faced) I was just makin' talk, Eben.

EBEN

Oh. (Another pause.) Marnie...

MARNIE

Yes...yes, Eben?

EBEN

Do you reckon we'll ever be able to have our own farm, and barn and... and a family like your pa and mine?

MARNIE

Of course, Eben. New couples always do.

EBEN

But we're so young, Marnie...and a farm of my own - it seems awful far away.

MARNIE

It's not. Ma's got a few acres over the next valley she's been tryin' to get cared for ever since Pa died. We could till that - it's right good land.

EBEN

And Sam's got those two mares he's been wantin' to sell...

MARNIE

And all the menfolks'd help us build the house - just like when Sally and Jim Byrd got married, and Tom'd fix up some of his chairs, and your sister could lend us a few of her old dishes, til we'd got settled I mean,...and Eben, we'd have the prettiest farm in the whole county! We could -

EBEN

(Suddenly taking her hands, and kissing them) Marnie! Oh, Marnie, I'd work so hard for you! I'd plough the brown earth way down deep, and sow the seeds in spring and then at harvest bring you corn and yams and green beans for your supper, and we'd watch the apple trees turn all pink and white with their flowers and then all red with the fruit, and we'd bless the good, good earth that'll give us life!

MARNIE

(Caressing him) We'd do it all together, Eben - you and I, together. We'll live and work and pray together, Eben, and we'll find all the happiness God can give.

EBEN

Oh, Marnie, it's too wonderful - I'm too lucky! Is isn't right for me to have all this - you and your love and our farm...

MARNIE

It is right, Eben. It's as it ought to be, as it always was, and always will be. I suppose that's what we're livin' for, Eben - to work and love...

EBEN

And be happy?

MARNIE

yes, and be happy. And I guess if we're happy, Eben, we'll be doin' right.

EBEN

Then we'll be as right as right, Marnie! Cause I'm happier now than I've ever, ever been, and because you're fine and good and perfect enough for both of us. (He buries his head in her lap.)

MARNIE

(With emotion) Oh, Eben! (She bends over him, rests her lips on his hair a moment, then straightens up.) Eben, I...I...(Unable to find words, she compresses her lips and looks away. After a pause, ina strained voice.) Eben, don't you reckon you'd best be goin' home now? It must be way avter nine...

EBEN

(Sitting up) Yes, Marnie. (He looks at her a moment; softly) Good-night. (He stands up; MARNIE does so too, and they kiss tenderly. There is a pause.) I love you, Marnie.

MARNIE

I love you, Eben. (They stand a moment longer, then EBEN turns and goes out of the pool of light. MARNIE looks after him a moment, then notices the guitar at her feat; she picks it up, starts to call after EBEN, thinks better of it, and instead draws the guitar to her bosom, hugging it close and kissing it. The light fades and goes out. There is a pause; then in the darkness a fiddle is heard in a gay square dance. The spot comes up slowly on a larger area than before including the edge of the porch and also the cleared space down center. The fiddling and offstage noises of a country dance grow louder,and MARNIE, dressed in a bright, "fancy" dress, comes running breathlessly up the path. She is in high spirits, evidently playing a joke on someone. She stops as she reaches the center, looks back, then laughs and runs to hide in the gloom behind one of the posts on the porch. EBEN runs on up left, stops, looks about, and calls.)

EBEN

Marnie! Where're you at, Marnie? (MARNIE giggles behind the post and EBEN pulls her out, both laughing.) What're you tryin' to do - deceivin' me before we're married?

MARNIE

(Laughing) But we're engaged now, Eben. It's almost the same.

EBEN

Almost isn't all...(Suddenly drawing her to him) But it's the first turn, Marnie - the first down our own new road. (He kisses her; then gaily) But what about finishin' my rightful dance - you can't get out of it by runnin' off!

MARNIE

I wasn't tryim' to get out of it, Eben. I just wanted to look at you alone for a minute. All the folks pressin' all round and drinkin' to us - I somehow didn't feel close to you...

EBEN

Don't ever say that, Marnie. You'll always be close to me.

MARNIE

I know it, Eben. I guess I just wanted to hear you say it - tonight. That's all. (They kiss)

EBEN

(Suddenly) And now for that dance, missy! (He takes her and they whirl round and round to the fiddle which is heard a bit louder.) Fine thing for the guest of honor to run away from her own dance - and she the best dancer, too! (They dance faster for a few moments.)

MARNIE

(Suddenly stopping in exhaustion.) Eben! Not so fast!

EBEN

I wish it could be faster! So fast we could never stop, and you'd become part of me and I part of you and nothing could ever make us separate...Never!

MARNIE

No, Eben...never! (She rests her head on his chest and there is a pause)

EBEN

(Softly) Did you ever dream it'd be like this, Marnie? As gay, and as wonderful - with the fiddles and the dancing and the cider? I only hope we can always keep it the same.

MARNIE

No, Eben, it won't always be as gay, and careless, and fast...and you won't want it to be. You'll want quiet, Eben, and rest after your work in the fields and the children around you when you come

home, all brown with the sun and strong from the ploughin'. But it'll be everything you could ever want, Eben,,, and (more softly) everything I could ever need.

EBEN

Marnie, this is the most wonderful October there's ever been, and you're just about the prettiest girl in it. (He kisses her, suddenly breaks away.) Listen, Marnie. The music's stopped. It's the end.

MARNIE

No, silly, just the beginning.

EBEN

(Smiling) For us, but for all the folks it's just the end of another shivoree.

MARNIE

Eben! I told you not to use that word!

EBEN

Shivoree? Why not? It's a good word - we've always used it.

MARNIE

For Sally and Jim Byrd, or the old folks - yes. But Eben, I want this to mean so much more for us than just a drinkin' and dancin' party. It's just got to mean so much more...

EBEN

But there's no other word to use, Marnie. Do you want me to be high-falutin' and say "betrothin' ball" ? It was a downright good shivoree and that's all there is to it!

MARNIE

It was nice, Eben, very nice. (Hesitatingly) Don't you think we'd better go now and say good-by to the folks...and thank 'em for comin' to our...shivoree?

EBEN

(Laughing) Now you're a silly! No, we said heddo...let Ma say good-by. Besides I haven't had you to myself all evening.

MARNIE

(Softly) We really should go, Eben...it's right.

EBEN

(Caressing her hair; now) Is it ?

MARNIE

(A whisper) Yes, Eben.

EBEN

(Still lower) This is all that's right. (He kisses her passionately, her arms reaching about his shoulders and head. After a moment MA enters up left. She is a strong, weather-beaten mountain widow of about fifty. The couple break away in embarassment as she approaches.)

MA

Now don't let me interrupt anything you kids were doin'...

EBEN

(Laughing) What a Ma you're goin' to be! I can call you "Ma." now, can't I, Ma?

MA

Well anything Marnie says, Eben. You know she's got first claim to that right.

MARNIE

Well I'll give you permission, Mr. Eben. We've got the same Ma now.

EBEN

Thanks, Marnie. (He turns and kisses MA)

MA

(Breaking away) Here! I didn't give any sort of permission for that! And Marnie didn't either. You'd best be watchin' your new man, Marnie. He's a wild 'un.

EBEN

I ain't nobody's man yet - not til spring, anyway. And I've a good right to kiss any pretty girl I take a mind to. And I've a ~~good~~ mind to right now. (He kisses MA again.)

MA

(Laughing) Eben! (Then, taking his hands; softly) Are you happy, son?

EBEN

More than I can ever ~~say~~ tell.

MA

And what does my baby say? (She takes MARNIE to her) Marnie, are

you happy? (MARNIE buries her head in Ma's shoulder and nods. MA caresses her.) Well, I guess it's been a big night for both of you...must be after midnight. You'd best be gettin' to bed. (She sighs, then turns to EBEN. Smiling sadly) Eben, you're gonna have to do a lot of lookin' after when you get this girl of mine - you'll have to tell her when to go to bed, and when to get up, and when to start the coffee, and when to polish the stove... she's got no head on her shoulders...(As MARNIE starts to protest she stops her with a caress) Guess that feather brain comes from me. But she's got a heart, Eben, a right good and strong heart, one that'll love you day and night and never stop...guess she got that from her Pa. (She suddenly embraces MARNIE with all her strength, stifling a sob in her hair.)

MARNIE

(Soothingly) Ma...Ma, I'll always be your girl. I'll come over to see you and help you every day, honest I will, Ma.

MA

(Shaking her head) 'Twouldn't be right. You'll be Eben's wife come spring, and I won't have you traipsing over to me every day. He'll need you.

EBEN

But we'll need you, Ma -

MA

You're a good boy, Eben, and I'm proud to have you as my son. Gotta give Marnie some credit for her pickins. But when the snows melt and the streams're full and rushin' all happy to be free again, and the ground turns soft and warm, and the sun feels good on your face - and you two are man and wife... why you'll be buildin' your own home and farmin' your own patch. You'll be makin' your own new life. (She shakes her head sadly and smiles) You won't need me.

MARNIE

But Ma -

MA

Now that'll be enough out of you, Missy. Time you was tucked in bed and fast asleep. (Softly, to EBEN) Take care of her, son. She loves you. (She kisses him, then MARNIE, and turns to the porch. As she climbs the steps she suddenly remembers something and turns back.) Oh, Eben. Did you see Joshua? Said he had some message for you.

EBEN

Only while we were dancin' Ma.

MA

Oh, well. Guess it'll keep. I told him you might be up here...

MARNIE

Oh, Ma!

MA

But I think he's gone with the others. Good-night, Marnie. Good-night, Eben...my son. (She turns and exits into the house. MARNIE and EBEN look after her a moment. Then MARNIE turns to EBEN.)

MARNIE

I guess I'd better go now, Eben.

EBEN

'll right, Marnie. (He looks at her a moment, then takes and kisses her.) Good-night, Marnie...my Marnie.

MARNIE

Good-night, Eben. (EBEN turns to go but is interrupted by the entrance of JOSHUA up left. JOSHUA is about sixty - the good-natured, poorly dressed, garrulous general store-keeper.)

JOSHUA

Oh, here you be, Eben. I kinda thought I'd find you up hereabouts. (He giggles)

EBEN

Hello, Joshua. Didn't get much of a chance to visit with you tonight.

JOSHUA

Yep, I noticed you did seem to be pretty busy all the time. (He winks toward MARNIE and giggles again.)

MARNIE

Good-evening, Joshua. Hope you had a nice time.

JOSHUA

Yessir. Always like these shivorees - makes me wish maybe I could have one some day.

EBEN

Well there's no tellin', Joshua. (There is an uncomfortable pause.)

MARNIE

I...I was just goin' in when you come, Joshua. Good-night. (She turns to go.)

JOSHUA

Durn! I almost forgot what I come for. Got a message for you, Eben. (MARNIE turns back.) We just got a special notice down the post-office.

EBEN

What's it about, Joshua?

JOSHUA

Well, it'pears like the goverment or somebody wants the names of all the young fellers in the county. Says you gotta re-gis-ter.

EBEN

What for?

JOSHUA

Durned if I know. Some kind of Selective somethin' Act. Just thought I'd tell you.

EBEN

Well thanks, Joshua. I'll be down in the mornin'.

MARNIE

It's nothin' important, is it, Joshua?

JOSHUA

I don't reckon as it is. Just another one of them new question-air-ries I guess. Well I'll be goin' then...comin' down the hill, Eben?

EBEN

I'll catch up with you, Joshua.

JOSHUA

Sure, Eben. Well, good-night. (He exits up left. There is a pause.)

EBEN

Guess I'd better go too.

MARNIE

Guess you better had.

EBEN

Good-night, Marnie.

MARNIE

Good-night, Eben. (She goes to him and they kiss. EBEN breaks away and slowly starts up left. MARNIE watches him a moment, then suddenly cries aloud.) Eben!

EBEN

(Turning back.) Yes, Marnie?

MARNIE

(After a moment) Nothin'...I just felt a bit cold, Eben...that's all.

EBEN

Oh. (Another pause) Well, good-night.

MARNIE

Good-night, Eben. (He exits. She looks after him and murmurs.) Just a bit cold...that's all. (She turns and slowly enters the house. The spot dims and goes out. A muted oboe is heard off-stage playing the first two phrases of "He's Gone Away," and the spot comes up in a few moments revealing the edge of the porch again. MARNIE is sitting on the step, a shawl wrapped about her shoulders, her arms crossed tightly. She gazes anxiously down the road a moment; then MA, wearing a heavy button-down sweater, enters from the house and closes the door.)

MA

You're up early, Marnie.

MARNIE

Guess I couldn't sleep much, Ma.

MA

(Sitting on the edge of the porch beside MARNIE.) No, I didn't think you would.

MARNIE

And then I was afraid I mightn't be up in time...

MA

You've got plenty of time, Marnie. He's not goin' til sun-up, and it ain't even cockcrow yet.

MARNIE

I know, Ma. (She pulls the shawl closer about her.)

MA

Feelin' cold, child?

MARNIE

Yes, Ma. Just a bit.

MA

(Putting her arm about MARNIE and drawing her close.) Well, I shouldn't wonder. What with these late snows. Seems like spring'll never come this time of year...

MARNIE

It isn't that, Ma.

MA

(Not hearing)...And all of sudden before you remember to take off your mittens, it's here - all warm and new and good to be livin' in.

MARNIE

Do you think it'll be like that next month, Ma ...when me an' Eben...

MA

Of course, child. Now don't you worry.

MARNIE

But Ma, supposin' he doesn't come back...(A note of fear in her voice) Supposin' he's not here next month...

MA

Now Marnie, I've told you time and time again he's just goin' for to stay a little while. He'll be comin' back in a few days or a week at most.

MARNIE

(Eagerly) Do you think so, Ma? Do you really?

MA

Of course.

MARNIE

But what's he got to go for anyway? I don't understand...

MA

Marnie, you mush't trouble yourself about it. I don't know why he's goin' any more than you. Only he got a notice from the post-office. So it must be somethin' from over the mountain.

MARNIE

But why won't he tell me? Eben knows what it's all about, but he won't tell me.

MA

Why Eben just didn't want to interfere with your weddin' fixins. He don't want you to worry right before the weddin'. That's all.

MARNIE

Yes, I suppose that's it. But Ma, I feel so cold and queer and... and almost scared. I've felt it ever since he told me he was goin' away.

MA

But it's just for a little while...

MARNIE

I know. But I can't stop the feelin'. (She shakes her head sadly; then suddenly) But why can't he wait til after the weddin'? Why's he gotta go now?

MA

Now I don't know, Marnie. But I figure he just wants to get this business over with so's he can marry you next month with nothin' on his mind. Eben knows best, child.

MARNIE

(Softly) I'm so afraid, Ma. (She starts to cry into Ma's shoulder.)

MA

Now, now, Marnie. You don't want Eben to see you all weepy and everything...when he's only goin' for to stay a little while. (As MARNIE dries her eyes and sits up.) That's better. Now don't you

let on what you're feelin'. You just tell him good-by natural like and - (Looking off; quickly) Now here he comes, child. Fix your eyes...(As MARNIE does so) Now smile for him, Marnie, smile! There now. (MARNIE smiles, they both stand as EBEN enters slowly up left. He comes down to the edge of the porch and stands a moment in silence.)

EBEN

It's almost sun-up.

MARNIE

Guess it is. (There is a pause)

EBEN

Looks like it'll be a nice day.

MARNIE

Looks like it.

EBEN

Spring's in the air...

MARNIE

Yes it is, Eben. (There is another pause)

EBEN

(Sighs almost inaudibly, looks down. Softly) Guess you know why I come.

MARNIE

(A whisper) Yes, Eben.

EBEN

It's only gonna be for a little while...

MARNIE

I know, Eben.

EBEN

And I'll be back before you know I've even been gone. (As MARNIE looks away struggling to withold her tears, he goes on quickly.) And you'll be so busy makin' your weddin' dress and...

MARNIE

(Softly) You know it's all made, Eben. It's been waitin' all winter.

EBEN

Well, then arrangin' all the fixins - you know more about 'em than I do - and you won't even miss me. Then I'll come back when everythin's all ready. Anyhow I'd just be in the way all the time... you'll be glad I'm gone for a while.

MARNIE

(Looking at him) Will I, Eben? (EBEN is nonplussed and there is a pause.)

MA

(Coming to the rescue) Well if I'm ever gonna get the chores done, I'd best not be standing out here. (She crosses to EBEN) Good-by, son. Take care of yourself.

EBEN

Good-by, Ma. (She kisses him)

MA

We'll have everythin' ready for the weddin' by the time you're back. So don't you worry about a thing. (She crosses to the porch,then turns.) And Marnie'll be peffectly all right. (To MARNIE) Remember, Marnie. (Shelooks at MARNIE a moment, then exits into the house.)

EBEN

What'd she mean?

MARNIE

Nothin', Eben.

EBEN

You're all right, aren't you, Marnie?

MARNIE

(Forcing a smile) How can I be when you're leavin' me?

EBEN

But only for a little while, Marnie, you know that.

MARNIE

Even so, Eben, I don't want you to go.

EBEN

I can't help it, Marnie. I have to go.

MARNIE

But you don't even know who the notice is from. No one in the county sent it.

EBEN

(Smiling a bit sadly) No, no one in the county sent it. It's from another county, Marnie.

MARNIE

Then why must you go?

EBEN

Why? Why because they asked me to go.

MARNIE

(Perplexed) "They?"

EBEN

I can't tell you who, Marnie...and you wouldn't understand if I did. It's just something from the outside world. It's reached over the mountains from another county 'way far off and it's found us even in our own valley. There's nothin' for me to do but go.

MARNIE

(Frightened) Why, Eben, you talk like you were goin' a long way off...

EBEN

I may be, Marnie.

MARNIE

(Anxiously) But you said it was only for a little while. You said so, Eben, just for to stay a little while!

EBEN

(Uneasily) Yes, Marnie. Just for a little while. I'll be back soon.

MARNIE

(In relief) I'm glad. I couldn't let you go, Eben, if I didn't know you'd be back soon - in time for our weddin'.

EBEN

(Looking off, hiding his concern) I'd better be startin', Marnie. Don't want to keep Joshua waitin'. (He turns back to her, looks into her eyes a moment, then softly, earnestly) Good-bye, Marnie.

MARNIE

(Coming to him) Good-bye, Eben. (They stand looking at each other a moment, then on mutual impulse rush into each others arms and kiss as though for the last time. They break, he holds her hands and starts to sing, never taking his eyes or hands from hers.)

EBEN

(Singing) I'm goin' away for to stay a little while,
But I'm comin' back if I go ten thousand miles.
Oh, who will tie your shoes?
And who will glove your hands?
And who will kiss your ruby lips when I am gone?

MARNIE

(Singing) Oh, it's Pappy'll tie my shoes,
And Mammy'll glove my hands,
And you will kiss my ruby lips when you come back.

(The oboe off stage softly continues the melody. EBEN and MARNIE stand a moment longer, kiss lightly, tenderly, then EBEN slowly walks out up left, turning for a last good-bye with his eyes before he exits. MARNIE gazes after him a moment, then slowly crosses to the porch, sits on the edge and looks out after him. The oboe comes to the last phrases of the song and MARNIE sings them softly, almost distantly.)

MARNIE

(Singing) ...For he's gone, he's gone away for to stay a little while,
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

(She leans back against the post and closes her eyes when she finishes. The spot has dimmed out, and the first blue streaks of dawn have lit the sky during EBEN's exit, and the stage has grown brighter. Now all is alight with the morning sunshine much as the golden afternoon glow of the first scene. MARNIE suddenly opens her eyes, starts, looks about her, sighs, and sinks back. There is a pause; then MA comes out of the house. She wears a different dress from that of the preceding scene.)

MA

(Putting on her apron as she enters; seeing MARNIE in surprise) Why, Marnie! What're you doin' out so early?

MARNIE

(Wearily) It's not early, Ma. Just kinda late.

MA

You don't mean to say you've been sittin' out here all night?

MARNIE

Yes, Ma.

MA

Why whatever for, child?

MARNIE

I don't know - I was just thinkin'.

MA

Seems to me thinkin's about all you've been doin' for nigh on a year now - ever since...

MARNIE

Yes,Ma. Just thinkin'...and kinda rememberin' -

MA

Well you shouldn't be sittin' out all night anyway. What with the winter almost here you're liable to catch your death of cold. These Indian summer evenin's are cooler than you'd think.

MARNIE

All right, Ma. I didn't mean to stay out all night...I must have dozed off...

MA

Well you'd best be gettin' washed and be eatin' your breakfast. The days keep gettin' shorter and shorter, and that corn's far from the bin. (Looking across at the distant hills, and sighing in appreciation.) But it seems that the short days always bring the best weather - just look at those hills...all red and yellow and that one over there all green by itself with the hemlock. (Glancing at the tall pines down left) And just look at our pines, Marnie, like giant watchmen...how old do you suppose they are?

MARNIE

(Still in her reverie) What, Ma?

MA

I say, how old do you suppose our pines are?

MARNIE

(Listlessly) Oh, I don't know, Ma. Pretty old, I guess.

MA

(Looks at her a moment, then suddenly) Marnie, you gotta stop worryin' about Eben. It ain't gonna do you no good.

MARNIE

It's eight months, Ma.

MA

Eight months can still be a little while, child.

MARNIE

Can it, Ma?

MA

I don't know what's to be done - (Giving up with a shake of her head) But come on in and I'll give you breakfast. And then we'll get to that corn before the frost.

MARNIE

Feels like the frost has been here all summer.

MA

Now you get yourself inside, missy, and don't you be mopin' about all day! Go on, in with you! I'll take myself another breath of air and you be fixin' the table.

MARNIE

(Sighs and rises wearily) Yes, Ma. (She exits into the house.)

MA

(Looks after her, shakes her head, then crosses to the pines looking admiringly up at them and fingering their bark reverently. Suddenly she hears something, crosses up center and looks off left. Calling) Why, Joshua!

JOSHUA

(Off, calling) Howdy, Ma!

MA

(Calling) Well come on up! (JOSHUA enters up left, breathless.) What must you be thinkin' of, Joshua, to come climbin' up that hill this early...and at your age,too.

JOSHUA

(Breathing hard) Didn't get to have no choice, Ma.

MA

Why what's the matter?

JOSHUA

Got somethin' important for Marnie.

MA

For Marnie?

JOSHUA

(Proudly) Yep. (He reaches in his shirt pocket and takes out a wrinkled telegraph envelope.) A telegram!

MA

(In awa) A telegram! For Marnie! Why whoever from?

JOSHUA

Durned if I know. (He reads the address) Comes from Washington, District of Columbia, though.

MA

Well I'd better get Marnie right quick then. (She turns toward the house)

JOSHUA

Who does she know way up there?

MA

(Calling) Marnie! Marnie, come out here! (To JOSHUA) What's that you say, Joshua?

JOSHUA

I say, who does -

MARNIE

(Entering from the house) What's the matter, Ma? (Seeing JOSHUA) Why, Joshua! What're you doin' up here so early?

MA

Marnie, Joshua's got somthin' for you. A telegram.

MARNIE

(In wonder) A telegram? For me?

JOSHUA

Yep, came all the way from Washington, District of Columbia,too...

MARNIE

But how do you khow...

JOSHUA

(Holding the telegram out to her) See, it's right on the front... (Reading) "Washington, Dis-

MARNIE

(Looking at it curiously) What do you suppose it's about?

MA

Well, let's open it and let Joshua read it.

MARNIE

(Still gazing in wonder at the telegram) Yes...

MA

What's it say, Joshua?

JOSHUA

Well, now...(He starts to open it. Suddenly MARNIE grabs it from his hand.)

MARNIE

(Screaming) Don't! Don't you read it!

MA

Why, Marnie, what's the matter? Don't you want Joshua to read it to you?

MARNIE

It's mine! No one's gonna read it but me! (Half crying, she hugs the telegram to her breast.)

MA

But you know you can't read, Marnie.

MARNIE

(Fiercely) Yes I can! I can read what's ~~meant for me~~ mine!

MA

(Looks at MARNIE a moment, then quietly to JOSHUA) Guess you better go now, Joshua.

JOSHUA

If you say so, Ma..

MA

(Looking at MARNIE) 'Pears like nobody's gonna read it just yet. Thanks anyhow, Joshua.

JOSHUA

Nothin' at all, Ma. (To MARNIE) If you want me to read it for you later, Marnie, I'll be down at the store all day. (MARNIE makes no answer and turns away still shaking. JOSHUA is a bit embarassed.) Well, sorry. Mornin'. (He exits up left.)

MA

(Looks at MARNIE a moment. Then, quietly) Why didn't you let him read it to you, Marnie?

MARNIE

(Softly) I'm afraid, Ma.

MA

Marnie!

MARNIE

(Trembling) Yes, Ma. I'm so terrible afraid.

MA

(After a pause) Well youdon't have to read it if you don't want to I guess. It's yours. (She waits for an answer, but MARNIE is

silent, still hugging the telegram to her.) We can put it over the stove if you like - it'll look right pretty.

MARNIE

All right, Ma.

MA

Kinda brighten up the kitchen...

MARNIE

Yes, Ma.

MA

(Softly) Do you want me to take it in, Marnie?

MARNIE

Not for a little while, Ma. Let me look at it for a little while. I'll be right in.

MA

All right, child. I'll finish breakfast. (She crosses to the porch, turning back at the door. Anxiously) You'll be in right soon?

MARNIE

In a little while, Ma. (MA looks at her a moment, then goes in. MARNIE looks at the telegram in her hand a moment. The oboe off stage begins "He's Gone Away" and continues to the end. During the first verse MARNIE walks about distracted, slowly, almost without purpose. She crosses vaguely to the pines, then up center, and down again, her eyes ever fixed on the telegram. As the oboe comes to the second verse she sings almost involuntarily, and apparantly to the telegram.)

(Singing) Oh, it's Pappy'll tie my shoes,
And Mammy'll glove my hands,
And you will kiss my ruby lips when you come back!

(Now letting the telegram down, she sings with passion, plaintively)

Oh he's gone, he's gone away,
For to stay a little while;
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

(Now looking out into the distance with deep yearning and longing)

Look away, look away, look away over Yandro.
On Yandro's high hill, where them white doves are flyin'

From bough to bough and a-matin' with their mates,
So why not me with mine?

(Now with her former dejected air)

For he's gone, oh he's gone away
For to stay a little while,
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

(Now almost wildly, with sudden passion)

I'll go build me a desrick on Yandro's high hill,
Where the wild beasts won't bother me nor hear my
sad cry;

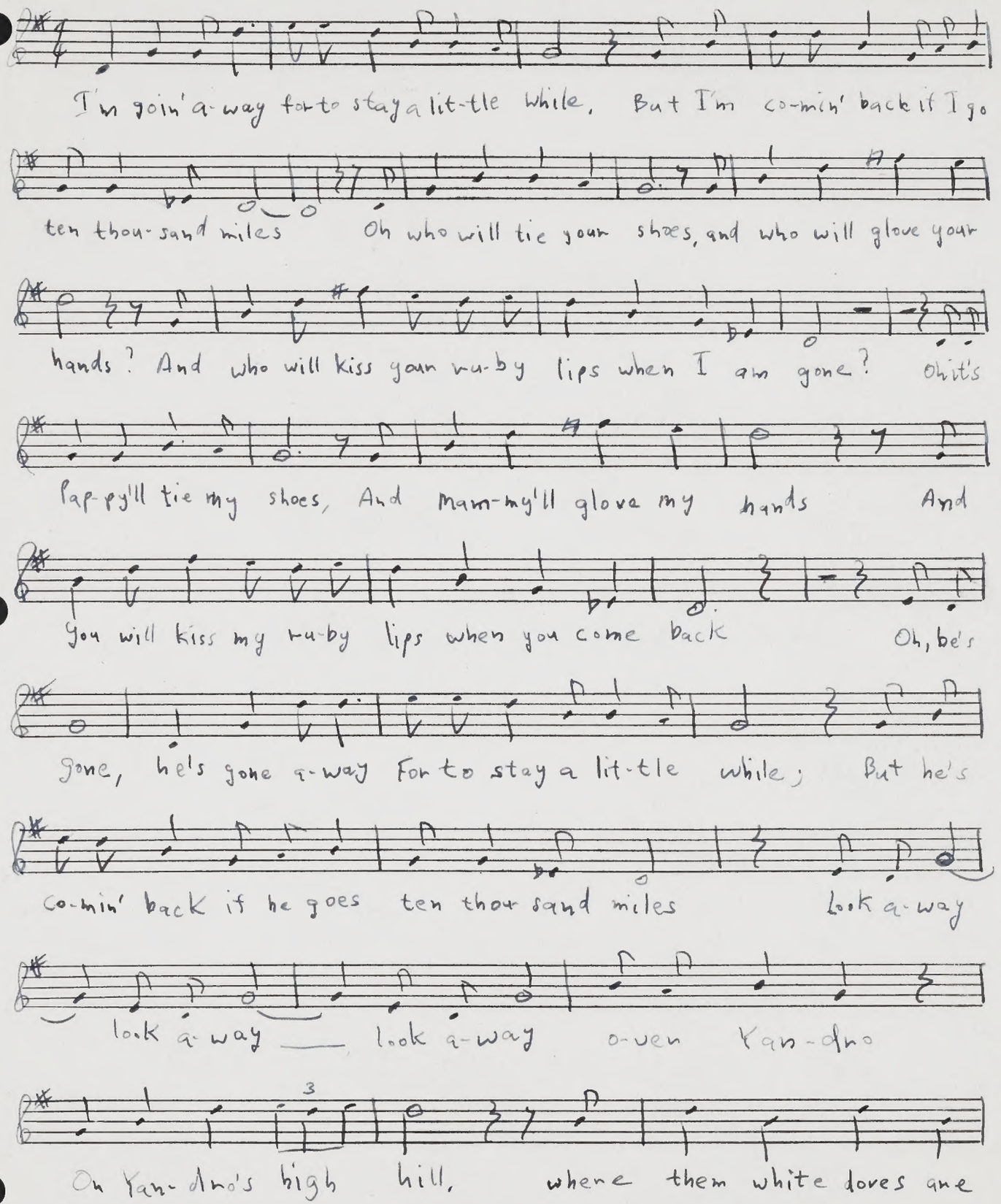
(For a moment it might seem as if she meant to do it, but the utter futility of anything at all overcomes her. She walks slowly, almost automatically back to the edge of the porch, sits, and sings emptily, hardly with human emotion.)

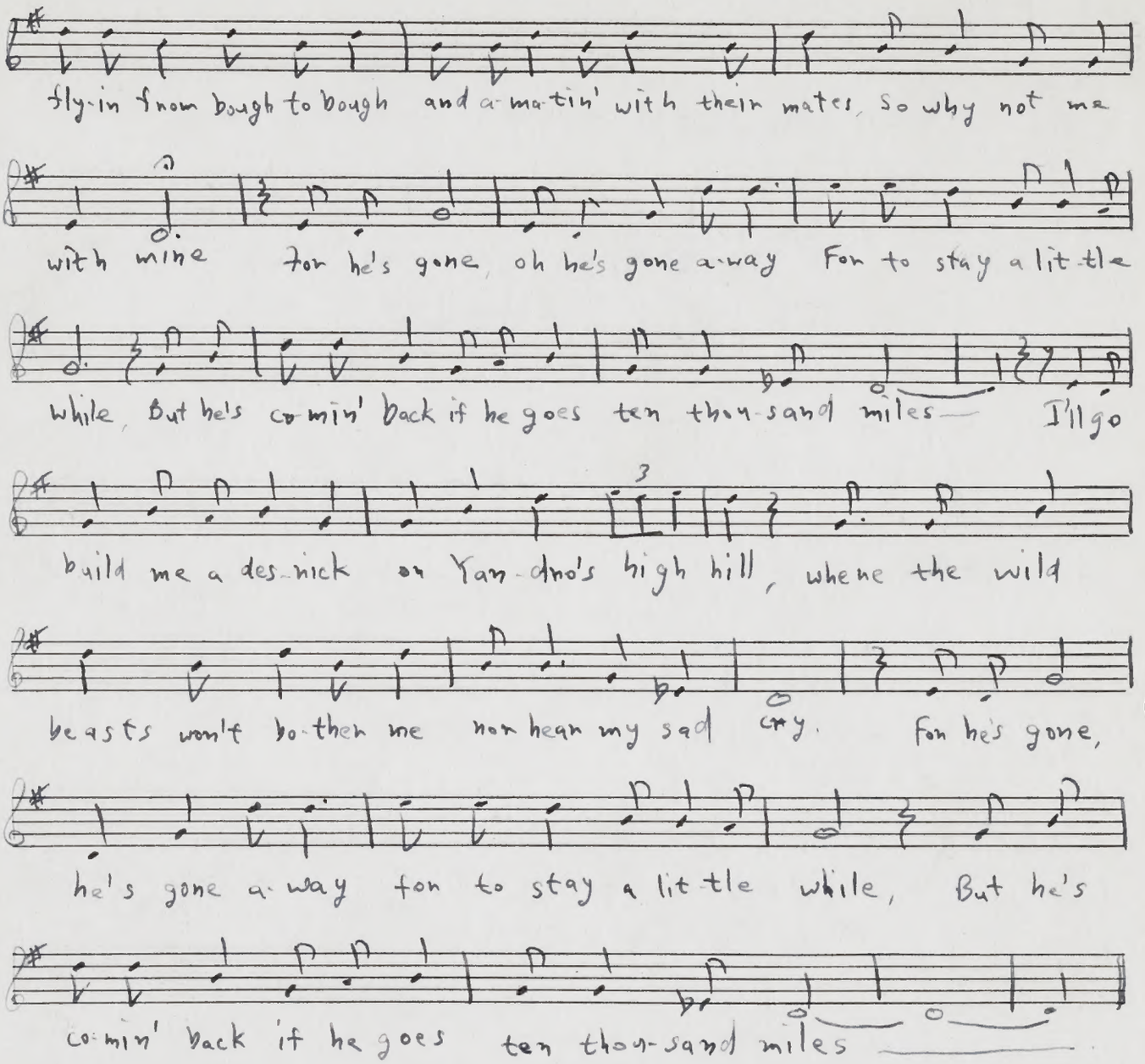
For he's gone, he's gone away
For to stay a little while,
But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand miles.

(Sensing the hopelessness of even this last hope, she leans back against the post, her eyes expressionless, and the telegram drops from her hand unheeded and flutters to the ground. The oboe repeats the last phrase slowly; she continues to stare into the blank air; and

The Curtain Falls.)

He's Gone Away


I'm goin' a-way for to stay a lit-tle while, But I'm co-min' back if I go
ten thou-sand miles Oh who will tie your shoes, and who will glove your
hands? And who will kiss your ru-by lips when I am gone? Oh it's
Pap-py'll tie my shoes, And Mam-my'll glove my hands And
You will kiss my ru-by lips when you come back Oh, he's
gone, he's gone a-way For to stay a lit-tle while; But he's
co-min' back if he goes ten thou-sand miles Look a-way
look a-way ___ look a-way o-ver Kan-da-no
3
On Kan-da-no's high hill, where them white doves are


fly-in from bough to bough and a-matin' with their mates, So why not me
with mine for he's gone, oh he's gone a-way For to stay a lit-tle
while, But he's co-min' back if he goes ten thou-sand miles— I'll go
build me a des-nick on Yan-dro's high hill, where the wild
beasts won't bo-ther me nor hear my sad cry. For he's gone,
he's gone a-way for to stay a lit-tle while, But he's
co-min' back if he goes ten thou-sand miles

— Carl Sandburg, American Songbag. p. 3.